



CITY OF EAST LANSING

Quality Services for a Quality Community

MEMORANDUM

TO: George Lahanas, City Manager
Tim Dempsey, Director of Planning and Zoning

FROM: Howard Asch (*Head of Building Dept. @ that time*)

DATE: May 18, 2012

SUBJECT: Rental Property Owners Zoning Issue

City of East Lansing
410 Abbot Road
East Lansing, MI 48823

(517) 337-1731
www.cityofeastlansing.com

It has come to my attention that rental property owners are seeking a change in zoning requirements to allow single family houses to be able to be altered in such a way as to maintain existing occupancy while providing separate bedrooms for each licensed individual. I understand the zoning enabling act establishes limitations on such work when it is in an existing nonconforming building.

I understand our ability to allow an expansion of a nonconforming use may be limited. However, in many situations it would be desirable for the safety of the occupants if these buildings were altered. Many older houses do not have windows in sleeping rooms large enough to meet today's minimum standards for emergency escape. Sleeping rooms that are altered or added would have these windows. Many of the older houses operate on an electrical system without a grounding system. All new work would contain grounded wiring that reduces the danger of electrical shock and would eliminate use of extension cords, a common cause of fire. Significant building alteration would also require hard wired interconnected smoke detectors to alert all occupants when any single unit sounds.

The current application of the law permits owner occupants to make these upgrades, but an identical house next door would not be allowed to do this construction even when rented to a family the same size as the adjacent. It seems the inclusion of occupancy in the zoning code has had the unintended consequence of rental dwellings being less likely to be updated than owner occupied properties.

I would encourage finding a creative approach that would encourage rental houses to be treated the same as owner occupied houses in order to promote safety of all residents regardless of one's ability or willingness to own property.



PLANNING, BUILDING, AND DEVELOPMENT

Quality Services for a Quality Community

MEMORANDUM

TO: George Lahanas, City Manager

FROM: Darcy C. Schmitt, Planning and Zoning Administrator

DATE: January 24, 2015

SUBJECT: Single-Family Dwellings with Non-conforming Uses

City of East Lansing
PLANNING,
BUILDING &
DEVELOPMENT
410 Abbot Road
East Lansing, MI 48823
(517) 319-6930
www.cityofeastlansing.com

The City held a facilitated dialogue with twenty-one people late in 2014 to assist the City in finding common ground between landlords and residents from neighborhoods most affected by single-family residential structures with nonconforming rental licenses. The dialogue was held on two separate days for two hours. The dialogue revolved around the following question:

“How can we change or apply the current non-conforming use regulation in a way that reasonably serves the interests of both rental property owners and owners of single-family dwellings?”

The process produced the following key recommendations:

Zoning: The city should engage in a detailed process to consider targeted, neighborhood-specific rezoning with the primary goals of protecting homeowners and neighborhood character, meeting the real need for student rental properties, and improving the quality of housing.

Reasonable Improvements: Allow structural improvements of the rental housing stock in areas where neighborhood character has not been compromised, with safeguards that ensure the licensed occupancy of the property will not increase, and that exterior improvements are consistent with those made to the interior.

Licensed Mobility: Explore the potential advantages and consequences of allowing a separation of a rental license from the property for which it was originally obtained.

Local Agent: Require that all rental properties have a local agent that will represent the landlord if the landlord is absent and take responsibility for maintaining properties and complying with housing regulations.